It is very disheartening to see how hypocritical the state of MN can be on the topic of clean water. My self and others I know have spent countless hours trying to work with the state to keep water clean. Rather than working with the public, the state chose to spend money on some projects with no water quality benefit and uncorrectable damage to soil of nearby land owners. We have also witnessed the state deny the people of Minnesota the ability to improve water quality, or force the public to take land out of production with very little if any effect on water quality. We have even witnessed the MPCA force feedlots to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on projects that will actually increase total pollution. The following paragraphs will explain in more detail specific instances where this has happened.

First we will look at the diversion channel project in Marshall MN. The city wanted to protect its residents from flooding so they built a diversion channel around the city to push all excess water onto the nearby farm land. Many people who would be affected by this project looked for other solutions such as upstream retention projects that would not only protect the city but would also prevent erosion and provide a recreational area for Minnesotans for a similar cost. Despite the efforts of the people of MN the state and local governments decided to push there excess water onto local farm land causing irreparable damage to fields and enormous amounts of water pollution.

Second is the story of a man who has always been an advocate of protecting soil. He has built several large retention structures with little or no government funding because he believes in being a good steward of his land. He has completed many projects to prevent erosion on his own land, many of them having no government funding. He also purchased a scraper so that he and others in his neighborhood would have access to a tool that would allow them to create and maintain erosion prevention structures. Recently this man noticed that the stream was eroding the streambank on a new piece of land. There is a water retention structure downstream going under the county road a few hundred feet away and a manmade livestock watering pond on the other side of the road. He found it hard to believe that the county or state had not taken care of this issue causing a significant amount of erosion and water pollution. He proceeded to call the county office to see if they were aware of the erosion. They told him there was nothing they could do about it. Then, he called the state where he was told to call the Army Core of Engineers. After several conversations and hours of paperwork with the Army Core of Engineers he was told that he could not proceed to fix the streambank erosion with his own money and equipment because he did not spend more time and money to have a study done to prove that the project would do more good than harm.
To conclude the above incident a man who was trying to prevent erosion with his own time and money was told he needed to do a study to prove that the benefits would outweigh any negative effects. At the same time the state was also telling this man that he needed to take many acres of land out of ag production along ditches, steams and bodies of water all in the name of water quality. The state was stealing the production of his land and with virtually no positive affect on water quality and denying him permission to do a project that would improve water quality. I am referring to the buffer strip law and I can say it had virtually no effect on water quality because this man already had buffers where they were useful and many of these acres sloped away from the bodies of water so putting perennial vegetation along them had virtually no effect on water quality. Does it make sense that a man who owns land has to do a study to prove to the state that the project he is doing to prevent erosion on his land with his time and his money will be good while the state is telling him that he can no longer farm many of his acres of land because they think it might help prevent some erosion? I and many people I know are supporters of buffer strips but they MUST BE in the RIGHT SPOT. The one size fits all approach that was passed will cost the agriculture community large sums of money for very little if any benefit. Why can the state force land owners to take land out of production without proving it is beneficial while land owners cannot do a simple project to prevent erosion without submitting costly scientific proof that it will be beneficial? Are these costly regulations improving water quality?

From personal experience and the experience of others, it is controversial to say that the state is concerned about water quality. Recently I met with one of the head state MPCA employees in the feedlot division. He told me that he is requiring me to make changes to my feedlot even though he or his agency has not been able to come up with any evidence that these changes will decrease pollution. There is significant evidence that the changes will create more pollution. These changes will cost me tens of thousands of dollars every year to operate and maintain and hundreds of thousands of dollars to complete the first year with no state help. When I asked why a state agency would want to do this, I was told by the employee that it doesn’t matter what the pollution outcome is you have to do what OUR NEW rule says. He is not the only one who has told us this. We have heard it time and time again over the years with this agency.

You can see several examples of how the state is the problem, not the solution, for water quality. Why should the state get more involved when they are not managing their current agencies properly?

Minnesota does not need more cumbersome regulations.
It seems that the state is blaming everybody else for pollution, but it is forgetting to look at its own footprint. Who is in charge of the waterways in MN? It is the state. According to University Of Minnesota Doctor Satish Gupta’s research 70-80% of sediment was coming from stream bank erosion. However the people who want to make improvements to that number are not allowed to because they don’t have the time or money to come up with an acceptable study to show that their improvements will not have adverse consequences. Perhaps land owners should be able to do like the MPCA and make their own rules?

The state should be required to exhaust its resources before it is allowed to force the public to pay the bill, especially when there is no scientific data that shows their money is improving water quality. The state has refused to use DNR land for water retention. Wouldn’t water retention in the right places have a large impact on erosion and water pollution? It would make a huge difference in streambank erosion. How is the legacy tax money being used? The last I heard there were a lot of funds available that could be used to work on these projects or to incentivize people in the agriculture community to try new practices and see the effects on their operations. It is time that the state started using this money to make improvements rather than monitor what other people are doing. I could not believe the amount of money being spent on monitoring projects when I look at the legacy fund website.

While researching the new nitrogen rule it has come to my attention that very little research has been done on what effects it might have. I also saw no scientific evidence that this rule would affect water quality. The research that has been done is being used once again as a one size fits all approach. The future of this rule is not clear and it will be dependent on how whoever is in charge at the time interprets the rule. It does not take in to account the thousands of different scenarios, farming practices, or techniques used in the agriculture business. There are counties where voluntary practices are being rewarded and there has been much success. Why is the state trying to shove a one size fits all rule down the throats of agriculture business when there are systems in place that are proven to work?

Before the state shoves more rules and regulations down the throat of people in the agriculture field it needs look at all the areas it can first improve in. We all want safe, clean water. However, when the state is unwilling to work with the public on so many projects that I am personally aware of, it is clear the government in Minnesota needs to reevaluate its own practices before it tries to force more rules on the public. If clean water is the goal the state needs to work WITH the people and FOR the people.